



United States Department of the Interior  
BUREAU OF SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT  
WASHINGTON, DC 20240-0001

In Reply Refer To:  
Mail Stop VAE-BSEE-FOIA

April 23, 2019

Mr. Sam Richards  
MuckRock News  
DEPT MR 70777  
411A Highland Ave  
Somerville, MA 02144-2516

Dear Mr. Richards:

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) FOIA office received your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, on April 1, 2019 and assigned it control number **BSEE-2019-00130**. Please cite this number in any future communications with our office regarding your request. You have requested Scott Angelle's appointment and other calendars / schedules.

We are writing today to respond to your request on behalf of the BSEE. We have enclosed four files consisting of 1270 pages. Approximately 1270 pages are partially withheld under 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(5) and 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6).

**Exemption 5—[43 C.F.R. §§ 2.23, 24](#)**

Exemption 5 allows an agency to withhold “inter-agency or intra-agency memorandums or letters which would not be available by law to a party... in litigation with the agency.” [5 U.S.C. § 552\(b\)\(5\)](#); see *Nat’l Labor Relations Bd. v. Sears Roebuck & Co.*, 421 U.S. 132, 149 (1975). Exemption 5 therefore incorporates the privileges that protect materials from discovery in litigation, including the deliberative process, attorney work-product, attorney-client, and commercial information privileges. The information being withheld consists of conference call passcodes and phone numbers.

The BSEE has determined that the numbers and pass codes constitute intra-agency documents because they are only shared with members of the Department or their consultants for the purpose of conducting official government business. In addition to qualifying as intra-agency documents, the BSEE has determined that the pass codes and phone numbers qualify as “confidential commercial information” protectable by Exemption 5. In *Government Land Bank v. General Services Administration*, 671 F.2d 663, 665 (1st Cir. 1982), the court held that when the government enters the marketplace as an ordinary commercial buyer or seller, the government’s information should be protected from competitive disadvantage under Exemption

5. Exemption 5 prevails “where the document contains ‘sensitive information not otherwise available,’ and disclosure would significantly harm the government’s commercial interest.” *Id.* at 666; see also *Federal Open Market Committee v. Merrill*, 443 U.S. 340, 363 (1979).

Here, the government entered the marketplace as an ordinary commercial buyer of private conference call numbers and pass codes. In line with *Land Bank* and *Merrill*, the information is “sensitive and not otherwise available” as the numbers provide access to sensitive conversations between government employees and only the government and seller have access to the information. If the conference call numbers and/or pass codes were released, the government’s financial interest would be significantly harmed. The conference calls would no longer be private since unknown, non-governmental parties would have the ability to listen in to the calls. The funds spent on purchasing the call-in numbers and pass codes would therefore be wasted, and the conference call numbers and pass codes would be of no use.

Because the release of the conference call numbers and pass codes would significantly harm the government’s financial interest by publicizing sensitive information, the BSEE is withholding the information in accordance with Exemption 5 of the FOIA.

The deliberative process privilege does not apply to records created 25 years or more before the date on which the records were requested.

**Exemption 6—[43 C.F.R. §§ 2.23, .24](#)**

Exemption 6 allows an agency to withhold “personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” [5 U.S.C. § 552\(b\)\(6\)](#). The phrase “similar files” covers any agency records containing information about a particular individual that can be identified as applying to that individual. To determine whether releasing records containing information about a particular individual would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy, we are required to balance the privacy interest that would be affected by disclosure against any public interest in the information.

Under the FOIA, the only relevant public interest to consider under the exemption is the extent to which the information sought would shed light on an agency’s performance of its statutory duties or otherwise let citizens ‘know what their government is up to. The burden is on the requester to establish that disclosure would serve the public interest. When the privacy interest at stake and the public interest in disclosure have been determined, the two competing interests must be weighed against one another to determine which is the greater result of disclosure: the harm to personal privacy or the benefit to the public. The purposes for which the request for information is made do not impact this balancing test, as a release of information requested under the FOIA constitutes a release to the general public.

The information that has been withheld under Exemption 6 consists of personal information, such as personal cell phone numbers, personal email addresses and medical information, and we have determined that the individuals to whom this information pertains have a substantial privacy interest in withholding it. Additionally, we have determined that the disclosure of this information would shed little or no light on the performance of the agency’s statutory duties.

Because the harm to personal privacy is greater than whatever public interest may be served by disclosure, release of the information would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of the privacy of these individuals and we are withholding it under Exemption 6.

Mr. Gurney S. Small, Attorney-Advisor, Office of the Solicitor, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. was consulted.

**Appeal Rights—[43 C.F.R. §§ 2.57, .58, .59](#)**

You may appeal this response to the Department's FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer. If you choose to appeal, the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer must receive your FOIA appeal soon as possible after this letter. Appeals arriving or delivered after 5 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday, will be deemed received on the next workday.

**Your appeal must be made in writing.** You may submit your appeal and accompanying materials to the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer by mail, courier service, fax, or email. All communications concerning your appeal should be clearly marked with the words: "FREEDOM OF INFORMATION APPEAL." You must include an explanation of why you believe the BSEE's response is in error. You must also include with your appeal copies of all correspondence between you and BSEE concerning your FOIA request, including your original FOIA request and BSEE's response. Failure to include with your appeal all correspondence between you and BSEE will result in the Department's rejection of your appeal, unless the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer determines (in the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer's sole discretion) that good cause exists to accept the defective appeal.

Please include your name and daytime telephone number (or the name and telephone number of an appropriate contact), email address and fax number (if available) in case the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer needs additional information or clarification of your appeal.

*DOI FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Office Contact Information*

Department of the Interior  
Office of the Solicitor  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
MS-6556 MIB  
Washington, DC 20240

Attn: FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Office

Telephone: (202) 208-5339  
Fax: (202) 208-6677  
Email: [FOIA.Appeals@sol.doi.gov](mailto:FOIA.Appeals@sol.doi.gov)

**Conclusion**

For your information, Congress excluded three discrete categories of law enforcement and national security records from the requirements of FOIA. See [5 U.S.C. 552\(c\)](#). This response is

limited to those records that are subject to the requirements of FOIA. This is a standard notification that is given to all our requesters and should not be taken as an indication that excluded records do, or do not, exist.

The 2007 FOIA amendments created the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) to offer mediation services to resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. Using OGIS services does not affect your right to pursue litigation. You may contact OGIS in any of the following ways:

Office of Government Information Services  
National Archives and Records Administration  
8601 Adelphi Road - OGIS  
College Park, MD 20740-6001  
E-mail: [ogis@nara.gov](mailto:ogis@nara.gov)  
Web: <https://ogis.archives.gov>  
Telephone: 202-741-5770  
Fax: 202-741-5769  
Toll-free: 1-877-684-6448

Please note that using OGIS services does not affect the timing of filing an appeal with the Department's FOIA & Privacy Act Appeals Officer.

You also may seek dispute resolution services from our FOIA Public Liaison, the undersigned, using the contact information provided below.

This concludes BSEE's response to your request. If you have any questions about our response to your request, you may contact me by phone at (703) 787-1204, by fax at (703) 787-1207, by email at [bseefoia@bsee.gov](mailto:bseefoia@bsee.gov), or by mail at Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, FOIA Office, Mail Stop: VAE-BSEE FOIA, 45600 Woodland Road, Sterling, Virginia 20166.

Sincerely,

/s/ Ashley Rychak

Ashley Rychak  
Government Information Specialist (FOIA)  
BSEE FOIA Office

Enclosure:  
As stated